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A Protestant Revolution in Germany, 1989?

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A PROTESTANT REVOLUTION IN GERMANY, 1989?

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Thirty years ago, I had just started studying history and Protestant theology at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen, Germany. Gießen is a small, insignificant town in the German Federal State of Hesse (West Germany). A town normally unknown outside of Germany, neither romantic nor exciting. For me, however, it is inconspicuously connected with post-war history and the Cold War period, with the ethos of freedom that the American troops brought to the heavily bombed-out town when they entered Gießen on March 28, 1945. It is connected with the hope of freedom that brought many stranded people and refugees to Gießen. These two historical lines are symbolically represented by two locations: the Gießen Army Depot (in which over 10,000 US soldiers lived with their families), and the camp for displaced persons (which in 1950 became one of the three central German refugee camps for those who have fled from the German Democratic Republic (GDR)). By 1990, 900,000 emigrants and refugees from the GDR had arrived here. This place is where contemporary history became concrete and personal for me as a young student. In order to earn money for my driving license, I worked in the summer of 1989 in a pillow stuffing factory, which was right next to the refugee camp for GDR refugees. So, I was right in the middle when masses of GDR refugees arrived in Gießen every day in the summer of 1989. New colleagues stood at the table every day—young men and women from Karl-Marx-Stadt, from Bautzen, or from Leipzig, with a Saxon accent and almost always with the obligatory denim jacket. They stuffed pillows for 200 DM for two days, told why they had left the GDR, and what they hoped for in the future. Since then, my curiosity to learn more about life and people in the GDR and in the former communist countries has not let go of me. I feel gifted about this; I was allowed to approach this story in

a new Europe with open borders, but also gradually with an increasingly professional skill. I was able to get to know a story that is not just a German one, but a deeply European one. A story about oppression and freedom, about democracy, socialism, and social justice, about human rights and civil courage; and a story about the role that Protestantism played in the German Democratic Republic, a small country with 16 million inhabitants.

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It may be just a regional coincidence–or not. In any case, it is noteworthy that two of the most successful turning points in modern German history took place here, in the middle of Germany.[1] The former German Democratic Republic, usually called "East Germany," is the area from which Martin Luther began the Reformation in the 16th century. Wittenberg, the site of Protestant turmoil in the early modern period, is only about 60 km from Leipzig, which was the city of the Monday demonstrations in the autumn of 1989. Are there historical connections and cultural references? While there is no doubt that Protestantism played a political role in both upheavals, the question is where and when the Protestant revolution began in 1989? Were there any theological and political ties to Luther? And to what extent did Protestantism then contribute to the ending of the Communist regime? From what perspective could this be described as a Protestant revolution? Is such a way of thinking too simple, and does it not quite hit the mark?

1. How and When did the Protestant Revolution Begin?

The revolution was a quiet one and began in Protestant churches, discussion groups, and church action groups.[2] The World Council of Churches provided an important international

[1] This article is based on the lecture "A Protestant Revolution in Germany, 1989," given on 29th of January 2020. at St Edwards King & Martyr in Cambridge. I would like to thank very much Marietta van der Tol and the Protestant Political Thought-Project for the invitation and the outstanding discussions we had.

[2] For more details see my own years of research on the subject, most of which have been published in German. E.g. Katharina Kunter, *Erfüllte Hoffnungen und zerbrochene Träume. Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von Demokratie und Sozialismus (1980-1993)*, (Göttingen: 2006), which has numerous evidences of the sources used and interviews with eyewitnesses. See also Katharina Kunter. Nadezhda Beljakova, and Thomas Bremer, *„Es gibt keinen Gott!": Kirchen und Kommunismus. Eine Konfliktgeschichte, gemeinsame Autorenschaft mit Thomas Bremer und Nadezhda Beljakova*, (München: 2016); Katharina Kunter, "Als Religion wieder öffentlich wurde. Rückblicke auf die Rolle von Kirchen und Christen," in: *Horch und Guck* 25 (2017): 62-65; Katharina Kunter, "The End of the 'Kirche im Sozialismus'. 1989/90 as a Turning Point for Protestant Churches and Christians in the German Democratic Republic (FRG)," in: K. Koschorke (Ed.) *Falling Walls. The Year 1989/90 as a Turning Point in the History of World Christianity*, (Wiesbaden: 2009), 31-41.

impetus at its 1983 Vancouver Assembly by proclaiming the conciliar process for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The conciliar process itself developed into a complex matter; a topic better left for specialists in ecumenical theology. However, the basic idea was a socio-ethical renewal program that promoted justice, peace, and creation globally, but pushed for local implementation in parishes and communities. One objective of the ecumenical conciliar process was to inspire local ecumenical assemblies to convene in each country. Participation was the magic word. Let us not forget that this was the middle of the 1980s when the Protestant Church in Germany had a hierarchical and 'paternalistic' structure. A group of Protestants and theologians from what are today the federal states of Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt felt inspired and became involved. Among these were Heino Falcke, the well-known theologian and the Probst from Erfurt, and Christoph Ziemer, the Dresden superintendent. Under the heading "Hope learns to walk—justice for people, peace for peoples, liberation of creation," they called on Christians, congregations, and church-linked groups in 1987 to formulate their own thoughts and suggestions as to what they believed to be the contributions and tasks of Christians for these planned assemblies.[3] This was exactly the right impulse at the right time: they received almost 10,000 letters and postcards at the turn of the year 1987 to 1988. Community groups, groups and numerous individuals such as bakers, gardeners, or kindergarten teachers picked up a pen and formulated clearly and forcefully their experiences of what was lacking in everyday life in the GDR.[4] For many of them, the act of writing was, in itself, a personal encouragement; but they also hoped that the planned ecumenical gatherings would represent their concerns and needs. These 10,000 letters served as the foundation for the three ecumenical assemblies that were planned during 1988 and 1989 in Dresden and Magdeburg. For historians, they are an important source of social and everyday history, as they show the concerns and expectations of a cross-section of "average" GDR people. If you read the letters that are kept at the Central Archive of the Protestant Church in Berlin, Germany, you will be struck by the resignation and frustrations that pour out of them. There are reports of church evenings where the hopelessness and the resignation people felt, especially when it came to justice and peace, is evident. The Church was expected to counteract this resignation and encourage the long-hoped for social changes. An example would be this quotation: "We

[3] Almost all relevant church archives have kept the leaflet "A hope learns to walk." For the detailed pre-history of the Ecumenical Assemblies in GDR, especially from with Catholic perspective, see also Katharina Seifert, *Faith and Politics. The Ecumenical Assemblies in the GDR 1989/90*, (Leipzig: 2000), 72-136.

[4] The 10,000 postcards and letters are nowadays collected in the Archive of the Protestant Church in Germany *(Evangelisches Zentralarchiv*) in inventory 117. See also Christian Sachse, "Mündig werden zum Gebrauch der Freiheit." *Politische Zuschriften an die Ökumenischen Versammlung 1987-1989 in der DDR*, (Münster: 2004).

hope for broad activation and an awareness raising of the communities at the grassroots level in order to go into the future with great hope as Christians even if everything around us looks like death and the end."[5]

Statements such as this reflect the experience of the political and social situation in the GDR at the time. In 1985, the new Soviet Communist Party Leader (CPSU), General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, had initiated his program of domestic political reform and relaxation of foreign policy that became well known under the keywords "*Perestroika*" and "*Glasnost.*" Since then, dynamism had entered Soviet bloc thinking and the antagonisms of the Cold War. The *Solidarnosc* Trade Union Movement was recognized in Poland in 1988, while the new Prime Minister Rakowski initiated extensive economic and political reforms. The reform communists in Hungary had also started economic and social restructuring in 1988; and in February 1989, the multi-party system was introduced, and the sole claim to leadership by the Communist Party was abandoned. All of this meant the end of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which, since 1968, had given the Soviet Union the right to intervene if Socialism was under threat in one of its allied countries. The end of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which was officially announced in 1988, necessitated a new Soviet security concept and required more balanced relations with the Western countries of Europe. Gorbachev used the metaphor of the "Common European House" to describe this development.[6]

At the time, however, none of these changes in the Soviet Union, Poland, or Hungary, were felt in the GDR. On the contrary, the situation worsened: as well as the visible pollution (which was not recognized), the high level of foreign debt, the reduction in imports, and the supply bottlenecks felt by the population exacerbated the desperate economic situation. The State Security increased its presence in the country and had expanded its staff to 91,000 in 1989. By the end of the year, more than 100,000 GDR citizens had applied to move to the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e., Western Germany. The famous GDR author Christa Wolf has accurately expressed this resigned state of mind of many citizens in her novel *Kassandra*, which was read widely at the time: "It was exactly this getting used to the situation that took my hope away."[7]

In this situation, the call to the ecumenical meetings under the motto "A hope learns to walk" became a success. And perhaps this was already in itself a revolutionary moment: In a

[5] Archive of the Protestant Church in Germany (EZA) 117.
[6] He used this metaphor first in his speech in Prague on Apri 10, 1987, see Michael Gorbatschow, *Perestroika. Die zweite russische Revolution*, (München: 1987).
[7] Christa Wolf in her novel *Kassandra*, (Darmstadt: 1986), 116.

politically desperate situation, the Protestant Evangelical Church succeeded in reaching people beyond a small, inner-church circle. It reached people from different backgrounds and groups and found a common language for them. Most of the 10,000 postcards addressed the domestic situation and the problems of GDR society. These could be divided into three broad areas[8]: Firstly, the lack of fundamental democratic rights in the GDR, the call for "Glasnost in the GDR," and the desire to take responsibility for achieving changes. Secondly, the desire for freedom rights in the GDR (such as freedom of religion, freedom of travel, "freedom of the press without any censorship," and "genuine" freedom of speech and expression, or, as one postcard put it: "to be allowed to say openly what you think and what moves you, and to actually say it!" and "to do so without having to be afraid and without facing existential danger". Finally, as a third subject area, the lack of legal certainty, the demand for free elections, and the contrast between what is written in the constitution and the actual practice. Often the postcard writers refer to current developments in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary. All together, the 10,000 letters functioned as an outlet through which the political pressure for change erupted in GDR society, and they were instrumental in enabling the discussions at the Ecumenical Assemblies to develop their own dynamic content entailing political controversy.

2. The Revolution Takes Shape:
The Ecumenical Assemblies as a Platform for Church and Political Protest

The 10,000 letters to the Ecumenical Assembly, some of which were remarkably open and trusting, provided information about personal opinions and showed the restrictions and deficits of everyday life in the GDR that people experienced. However, they hardly expressed more complex socio-political ideas or concepts of how things could be different and how political parameters changed. The Erfurt-based Probst Heino Falcke later called the letters "The competence of those affected,"[9] as they formed the starting point for 13 working groups, all under the theological motto of the conversion into the Shalom, the return to justice, peace, and the protection of creation at the three Ecumenical assemblies in Magdeburg and Dresden. Topics included were life in solidarity,worldwide structures of injustice and living a life in solidarity with foreigners, more justice in the GDR, life in a creation that was endangered,

[8] See Kunter, *Erfüllte Hoffnungen*, 175-189.
[9] Heino Falcke in Ist die Hoffnung gegangen? Dokumentation einer Ökumenischen Tagung zu 10 Jahre Texte der Ökumenischen Versammlung in der DDR 1989-1999, 16.-18. April 1988 in Dresden, 25. In Archive of Ökumenisches Informationszentrum Dresden, Dresden.

ecology, and economy, the topic of peace-keeping and peace education, changing values or questions about military service. It was now the task of each working group to develop a common document, supported by all those involved within the time frame of 18 months. The document was then to be adopted by the full plenary of the final Ecumenical Assembly. The working groups presented their results to the Assembly, which were then discussed in detail by the plenary, and then revised by the groups. Nine draft texts were finally made available for discussion in the communities, and the remaining three texts (3, 5, 9) were to be revised by the working groups before approval.

The three Ecumenical Assemblies that took place in Dresden and Magdeburg in 1988 to 1889 not only shaped a context for internal discourse, but also created a new form of ecclesiastical-political substitute for public discussion with their form of work—which was always based on discussions, feedback, and revisions of the GDR. Around 150 active Christians from 19 churches, community circles and initiatives,[10] were not only more visible and better organized than in previous years, but were now able to represent their concerns with formulations and statements that had been tried and tested by the majority. The intensive discussion process was an important prerequisite for churches and Christians in the GDR to become publicly visible in the autumn of 1989, and to become part of the Peaceful Revolution.

The State was nervous "because of the explosiveness within society," and the Ministry of State Security monitored the various events and meetings with numerous operational measures and tried to influence people, discussions, and the shaping of texts wherever possible.[11] There was an intensive interplay taking place between the State, the Party, and Stasi. It is evident that from the State's point of view, the debates in Working Group 3 that focused on "More justice in the GDR" were considered particularly explosive, as the debates there were intended to produce a text on which a majority could agree: "More justice in the GDR."[12] Already the first draft showed a socio-political explosive force as it received, out of all draft texts, the highest number of letters from the communities, namely 221.[13] The government's attempts to influence or prevent the direction and success of this text were intensive, and it showed how seriously the government regarded the matter. Saxon Bishop Johannes Hempel spoke openly on April 30, 1989, to all participants in Dresden on how the State had put him

[10] This was a real ecumenical enterprise—Catholics and Protestants, different dioceses and Landeskirchen, as well as Baptist, Mennontes, Methodists, and other free churches—all those who were in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen.
[11] See e.g. the reports of the Stasi-Ministry in the Archive of the Stasi-Files, Berlin: MfS-HA XX/4 1526, 5 or MfS-HA XX/4 378, 4.
[12] See the final version of this text e.g. in *epd-Dokumentation* Nr. 21/89, 27-33.
[13] See Archive of the Protestant Church in Germany (EZA) 117.

under pressure when it came to accepting the text "More Justice in the GDR." It was a moving moment for all participants.[14]

The threat of the State put the fear among people, and this explains why the text "More justice in the GDR" only had an approval rate of 72.4% in contrast to all other texts that had an approval rate of more than 90%. Among those who rejected the text were some prominent names that held leadership positions in the Church. Nonetheless, the text was approved by the end of April 1989, by a two-thirds majority , and was released for publication together with a note to the communities and a letter to the children. Shortly afterwards, it became clear just how relevant and representative the work and discussions of Working Group 3 on "More justice in the GDR" really were when numerous working group members joined different civil rights movements and parties of the democratic opposition in the autumn of 1989. The Party program and political declarations, which were now quickly drawn up under time pressure, contained numerous expressions and content from the Ecumenical Gatherings. Later, some of them were even included in the new constitutions of the new federal states of East Germany.

To a historian or a church historian, another aspect of the discussions in Working Group 3 from these Ecumenical Assemblies in 1988 to 1989 seems to be of historical importance, namely, the theological controversy about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

3. Protestant Political Thought and Revolution

In the "More Justice" Working Group and other working groups, there were political controversies that ensued from different eschatological and ecclesiological concepts. The two main questions were: 1) Where is the Kingdom of God? Does it already begin here in the present? And if it also begins here, in the reality of the GDR, what are the consequences for the continued efforts of Christians to bring about socio-political changes? 2) How important is the idea of Socialism, and the commitment to democratic rights and constitutional institutions in this context, to the Protestant churches and to the individual Protestant believer? Does one necessitate the other, or are they mutually exclusive? And, depending on the answer to the above question, how should the relationship between them and the relationship to power and authority as a whole be described?

Embedded in these questions are different theological and ecclesiological positions that came to the fore in Germany´s post-war Protestantism. Someargued from a broader, perhaps

[14] The original audio-minutes of Hempel's speech in Dresden are in the archive of the Protestant Church in Germany (EZA) 117. Katharina Seifert, *Glaube und Politik*, 187 gives the printed version of this speech.

more strongly Barthian approach, that the kingdom of God should be viewed as a real historical or concrete utopia (among them were GDR theologians such as Heino Falcke and Christof Ziemer).[15] Socialism or democratic Socialism could continue to serve as a model for justice. In their opinion, it was essential that structures of power, authority, and state were repeatedly discussed and resolved in the present before the demand for conversion to the Shalom. On the other hand, this approach was opposed by the members of the Working Group, who explicitly referred to Luther's Two-Kingdoms Doctrine. Richard Schröder, for example, was a prominent representative of said approach.[16] For him and for others, the Kingdom of God was a regulative idea, and power and authority in the here and now, and it should not fundamentally be judged negatively. Consequently, so he argued, it must now be a matter of working for a reasonable democratic system in the GDR, and when this is achieved, a political theology will no longer be needed.

The official final text gives no indication of this controversy having taken place. But the fiercely debated discussions in this Working Group are also interesting because they, on the one hand, show that GDR Protestantism was by no means theologically and politically homogeneous and on the other hand, they show how there were clearly different political attitudes and democratic patterns of orientation among the participants of the Ecumenical Assemblies. During the system of dictatorship, the Protestant Church created an inner space of democracy with conflicting opinions, and at the same time, it fostered ecumenical solidarity. In this situation, it was actually about endurance and leaving room for competing different ideas of justice. The crucial point, however, was how to describe the fundamental attitude of Protestantism towards Socialism. It was precisely this difference that shaped the emergence of parties and civil rights movements, such as the "New Forum," "Democracy Now," the "Democratic Dawn (*Aufbruch*)," or the Social Democratic Party of the GDR in the autumn of 1989.

Against the background of the discussions about the Kingdom of God and justice in the GDR, it is not surprising that representatives of a Lutheran-oriented political pragmatism, such as Richard Schröder or Markus Meckel (who became the first freely elected foreign minister in the GDR), became founders of the Social Democratic Party in the GDR,[17] or later the

[15] For more details see Kunter, *Erfüllte Hoffnungen*, 191-204.
[16] See e.g. Richard Schröder, "Die Ökumenische Versammlung für Frieden, Gerechtigkeit und Bewahrung der Schöpfung in der DDR." In: Dirk Bockemann (Ed.), *Freiheit gestalten. Zum Demokratieverständnis des deutschen Protestantismus. Festschrift für Günther Brakelmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, (Göttingen: 1996), 395-412.
[17] Interesting are the just published memories of Markus Meckel, see Markus Meckel, *Zu wandeln die Zeiten*, (Leipzig: 2020).

Christian Democratic Party in the GDR. Those who, at the Ecumenical Assemblies, were more Karl Barth-oriented in favor of realizing the Kingdom of God in the present, found themselves as founders of civil rights movements such as the New Forum or Democracy Now.

Protestants who had previously fought for positions and texts at the Ecumenical Assemblies were involved in the founding of the new civil rights movements and parties. However, they had then consciously left the Church and devoted themselves to political work, democratization, and power control. Richard Schröder later formulated their common background from his own experience in Working Group 3 as follows: "(...) We were unanimous against the prevailing conditions of the SED [Sozialistische Einheits Partei] regime. But we were not unanimous for something specific (...)."[18]

This political dimension is a part of the Protestant Revolution. The Ecumenical Assemblies of 1988 and 1989 created a new form of ecclesiastical-political semi-public in the GDR; which, we must not forget, was an ideologically structured dictatorship from top to bottom. The Evangelical Church as an institution provided a place for those who wanted to change something in the GDR society and politics, for those who wanted to part with the non-religious and anti-Christian Communist ideology, and who were looking for religious and political freedom. They were courageous, as they, in an open-ended historical situation, went further than their own Church, abandoned the compromise line with the GDR state, and instead dealt with the concerns and needs of "regular" people. For the first time, they committed openly to concrete democracy and for free elections to take responsibility in a political process. And, perhaps, one should briefly remember that German Protestantism in the first half of the 20th century, after the collapse of the German Empire, rejected the democracy of the Weimar Republic for a long time. Even after 1945, German Protestantism in West as in East Germany found it difficult to accept the new democracy. Because of their largely anti-Western Protestant mentality, the post-war Federal Republic of Germany, the so-called "Adenauer-Republic," was seen as a political system imposed by the American and English victors. No wonder that it was not until 1983 that West German Protestantism committed itself to a public memorandum on democracy.[19]

The intensive discussion process at the end of the 1980s in the GDR finally led to a very narrow, institutional understanding of the Protestant Church. For the first time in its history, the Church's basis in the form of groups and networks visibly appeared in 1988 to 1989. In this

[18] Richard Schröder, *Die Ökumenische Versammlung*, 404.
[19] *Evangelische Kirche und freiheitliche Demokratie. Der Staat des Grundgesetzes als Angebot und Aufgabe. Eine Denkschrift der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, 4. Auflage, (Gütersloh: 1990).

context, theologians such as Heino Falcke even spoke of the groups as the fourth social form of the Church. With the help of this concept, they hoped, on the one hand, to be able to bridge the great hierarchical gap and polarization between the church leadership level and church base. On the other hand, they hoped that the conciliar process, as a kind of new social movement, would not only result in greater social openness, but also accentuate a politicization of the church.

I can remember how even in research projects in the 1990s, contemporary witnesses from the section of church leadership debated fiercely whether the "groups" should be seen as part of the Church, and consequently, also as part of Church History. Today, when the understanding of the History of Christianity has largely replaced Church History as a category, this question no longer arises. We all accept that the Church regards itself as being part of civil society. This shows how much the views of the Church and the reality of the Church have changed since the 1980s in both East and West Germany.

4. Autumn 1989—A Protestant Revolution?

What came to the fore in the Ecumenical Assemblies of the Evangelical Church reflected the great resignation, frustration, and hopelessness of a large part of the GDR population in the 1980s, as expressed in the 10,000 postcards mentioned at the beginning. Thousands of GDR citizens, especially the younger ones, saw no future in the GDR and only wanted to escape the country. At the end of 1988, around 110,000 GDR citizens applied to leave, and in July and August 1988, more than 50,000 people left the GDR.

The exit movement increased the pressure on the SED regime and mobilized the large demonstrations that took place in the autumn of 1989. The Evangelical Church was now the only institution that still enjoyed trust among the population. It did not call for opposition or revolution, and as an institution, it did not question the GDR regime; but it wished to mediate at the "round tables" between the Party, the population, and the opposition groups in which many Protestants were active. In many cases, it was also Protestants who stormed the Stasi headquarters, campaigned for free elections, and stood as candidates for different parties.

Politically speaking, it was the first free election that took place on March 18, 1990, and the clear vote for political freedom, security, and prosperity that were the decisive moments of the revolution. The old government had to resign; and new, independent, and often Christian citizens from the autumn of 1989, entered the political fray. The fall of 1989 and the work from above were therefore not a systemic turnaround of a renewed SED, which the party *Die Linke* still claims for itself with the term "*Die Wende* (turnaround)." Instead, it was the engine of a

comprehensive system change. It broke with the power of the one-party state and made possible free elections and democracy in a country that had not known these for 40 years. Politically unadjusted and socially marginalized Christians, among them numerous Protestants, took on public roles and political functions and looked for ways to democratically transform the GDR. As early as 1990, the Protestant pastor Erhart Neubert spoke of the "Protestant Revolution" that took place in the autumn of 1989.[20]

If the change of rule is the real characteristic of revolutions–and this is exactly what happened in the other Central and Eastern European countries at different speeds–then Protestants took on leading positions. In the first freely elected GDR government, there were a disproportionate number of Protestants. The moment in which the political space gave way to democracy and legal certainty, the Protestant Church in the GDR lost its exclusive character as being the only bearer of freedom. It was now merely a part of a large, confusing pluralistic field.

It is interesting that in the autumn of 1989, the term "freedom" did not play a significant rhetorical or political role to those Protestants who were involved in the opposition groups in the GDR, unlike Czech Protestants who were engaged in the civil rights movement Charter 77.[21] Here the scepticism of German Protestantism towards human and civil rights, and towards modern liberalism, continued to show its face. This was partly a legacy of the strong Bonhoeffer reception that had taken place in the GDR. It was after all Bonhoeffer, *the* German Protestant who had embodied Christian resistance to the Nazi regime, who in 1941, explicitly argued against the English theologian William Paton and his work "The Church and the New Order," and spoke out against a liberal, Anglo-Saxon interpretation of human rights.[22]

Bonhoeffer and following him numerous GDR theologians, subscribed to a German-influenced, idealistic way of reading; and in this view, the question of individual freedom such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or freedom of assembly could only be answered in the superordinate context of faith. He put it as follows: "Freedom is absolutely not, in the first instance, an *individual* right but a *responsibility*. Freedom is not primarily geared to the individual but to one's neighbour."[23]

[20] Erhart Neubert, *Eine protestantische Revolution*, (Berlin u.a.: 1990).
[21] Katharina Kunter, "Human Rights as a Theological and Political Controversy among East Germans and Czech Protestants," in Bruce R. Berglund / Brian Porter-Szücs (Ed.), *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*, (Budapest-New York: 2010), 217-243.
[22] See William Paton, *The Church and the New Order*, (London 1941) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Konspiration und Haft, Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Werke*, vol. 16, (Gütersloh: 1996), 539.
[23] Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Konspiration und Haft, Dietrich-Bonhoeffer-Werke, vol. 16, (Gütersloh: 1996), 539.

So while it was difficult for Protestants in the GDR to commit themselves to freedom in this way (the same was true for Protestants in the Federal Republic), a large part of the GDR population in March 1990 interpreted it as meaning an individual and political freedom. They trusted that political freedom would also bring economic prosperity and ensure some security. In the course of the 1990s, many established structures and lives collapsed in the GDR, and this also affected the legitimacy of the Church. While the churches were still full in 1989, many people subsequently left the Church. Only now did it become clear how radical the de-Christianization process had progressed in East Germany. As a result, the important role that the churches and the Protestants had played in the autumn of 1989 was increasingly downplayed. The evident secularization may have been one of the reasons why the notion of a Protestant revolution received less and less attention. However, scholarship begun in the 1990s increasingly pointed to other factors that played a part in marginalizing the contribution of Protestants in the autumn of 1989, and the insistence of the Protestant Church on a political order as a foundation could be such a factor. But, if one with the help of the German sociologist of religion, Friedrich Fürstenberg, understands the disproportionately visible political commitment of the Protestants and their opposition to the regime in 1988-89, as a social or civil religion, i.e., a socially committed form of belief, then it is feasible to speak of a Protestant Revolution. However, this also supports the criticism of some of the protagonists of the conciliar process in the GDR at the time. For the Erfurt Probst, Heino Falcke, and the Dresden superintendent Christof Ziemer, neither the fall of 1989 nor the free elections, nor the change of system or the reunification of Germany achieved what they had campaigned for in 1989: The global change of perspective, the conversion to the Shalom, to the Kingdom of God.

For them, the system change remained an unfinished revolution. Christoph Ziemer, for example, kept saying: "The change of system is not yet a shift of paradigm. We have had to recognize that the change in the political system is not yet an answer to questions of survival."[24]

[24] Christof Ziemer, "Einheit, die WIR meinen," in *Dokumentation des Ökumenischen Informationsdienstes* no. 2/91, IV.